

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1200

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

S E C R E T JIDDA 3369

EXDIS

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OVIP, SA, IR

SUBJ: IRAN-SAUDI RELATIONS

REF : A. JIDDA 3235; B. TEHRAN 4341; C. TEHRAN 4087

1. WE MAY HAVE READ TOO DARK A MEANING INTO THE SHAH'S REMARKS REPORTED IN REF C. IF THE EVOLVING EGYPTIAN-IRANIAN RELATIONSHIP CAN INDEED BE HANDLED BY THE LEADERS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES WITH TACT AND SUBTLETY IT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO AREA STABILITY AND THE SAUDIS COULD PROBABLY BE KEPT QUIET. WE INTERPRETED THE SHAH'S REMARKS ON EGYPTIAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS BEING "INCREASINGLY CLOSE, PERHAPS TO THE POINT OF FORGOING AN AXIS" AND HIS SAYING THAT "IT BEGINS TO LOOK AS IF THE TWO COUNTRIES MIGHT WELL DEVELOP JOINT POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO SAUDI ARABIA AND PERHAPS OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE AREA" AS MEANING A MORE FORMAL ARRANGEMENT THAN WAS APPARENTLY INTENDED.

2. THERE IS A POINT THAT WE SHOULD PERHAPS HAVE SPELLED OUT IN OUR COMMENTS (REF A): SAUDI ANXIETY IN THE EVENT OF A TEHRAN-CARIO AXIS WOULD NOT BE PROMPTED SOLELY, NOR NECESSARILY EVEN PRIMARILY, BY DOUBTS ABOUT IRANIAN INTENTIONS. THE SAG PRESENTLY HAS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT SADAT AND THE GOE. THE SAUDIS DO, HOWEVER, HAVE AN AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE TOWARD EGYPT IN GENERAL.

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THROUGHOUT MUCH OF ITS HISTORY, THE KINGDOM HAS BEEN

RELATIVELY INSIGNIFICANT IN COMPARISON WITH EGYPT. IT HAS AT TIMES, AS DURING MUCH OF THE NASSER ERA, STOOD IN QUITE FRANK FEAR OF EGYPT. SAUDI OFFICIALS IN POWER TODAY MIGHT STILL WINCE AT THE MEMORY OF THE PROPAGANDA BLASTS ONCE DIRECTED AT THEM FROM CAIRO. EGYPTIAN DIRECTED SUBVERSION WAS AT ONE TIME CONSIDERED A REAL THREAT TO THE REGIME.

3. THE REASON WHY SAUDI RELATIONS WITH EGYPT ARE NOW GOOD IS ESSENTIALLY THAT ALSO MAKING POSSIBLE GREATER IRANIAN-EGYPTIAN COOPERATION I.E. A MODERATE REGIME IN CAIRO. BUT THE SAUDIS DO NOT ASSUME THAT BECAUSE OF THIS THERE IS AN IDENTITY OF PERMANENT EGYPTIAN AND SAUDI INTERESTS. A FORMAL TEHRAN-CAIRO AXIS WOULD BE OF SUCH CONCERN TO THE SAUDIS BECAUSE TO SOME EXTENT IT WOULD MEAN A SHIFTING OF EGYPT OUT OF THE ARAB CONTEXT IN WHICH SAUDI ARABIA CAN EXERT ITS GREATEST INFLUENCE. IT WOULD ALSO PRESUMABLY RELIEVE CAIRO OF SOME PRESENT CONSTRAINTS--PARTICULARLY ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL--ON ITS POLICIES TOWARDS SAUDI ARABIA.

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